

THE GREAT KOERTGINI

Someone picks a card and fifty-one guesses later I get it right. With the shout, "Abracadabra," all the mothers scream and cover their ears while husbands call me a filthy son of a bitch. Nervously I announce Doves From Nowhere but they have all suffocated in my vest and plop to the floor. Quickly I cut a hat in half and pull Fluffy out of my pretty assistant but the tentative applause stops when my telescoping cane shoots into the audience almost blinding a famous surgeon. Yards of gaudy silk from the very air turn out to be one dingy snotrag, stiff as sailcloth. "Do that rabbit trick again" says a world class heckler and suddenly I know everyone has had Marsha-of-the-harem-pants but me.

PATHOS BILL

I know Wild Bill got the whores to laughing and he spent till he passed out, and Buffalo Bill had a million yarns and every one of 'em a corker. And, sure, Pathos Bill made the scarlet women bawl and he got the regulars thinking about their poor wives home making Dust Soup. But the mayor and his pals had no call to send for hired thugs to run Pathos out of town. He wasn't hurting anybody. He was just sad for a living like some of us are storekeepers or bartenders. So I went and hunted him up, found him standing in the bathtub at the hotel so's he wouldn't soak through the rug. When I told him, he just nodded, blew his nose and let slip a tear big as my fist. Straight up noon the next day he met Melancholy McGee and Dolorous Dan from Dorktown. Law, it was no contest. Their simple tales of coal & sticks for Christmas or little crippled collies was nothing compared to Bill's paralyzed nuns in a burning Conestoga that run over a whole row of blind orphans at prayer. He washed them cheap crooks right into the nearest gulch in a beaut of a flash flood. Then mounted up and drizzled out of town. But not before he'd shook my hand in thanks, this very one I write with now then make my mark to show that I have told the truth.

-- Ronald Koertge

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